

COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTH APPROACHES IN THE VA: A GLOSSARY AND WHERE YOU CAN LEARN MORE

The following is a list of complementary and integrative health (CIH) approaches that are important for VA clinicians to know about. This Whole Health tool lists CIH approaches that were featured in the following two important VA resources.

1. The 2015 VA Healthcare Analysis and Information Group (HAIG) survey found that the therapies listed in the following tables were offered in one or more VA facilities.[1]
2. The VA's Integrative Health Coordinating Center (IHCC) generated two important lists of CIH approaches. List 1 includes approaches that have evidence of promising or potential benefit, and that are now required to be offered by all VA facilities or through community partners if they are a part of the Veteran's treatment plan. These include:
 - Acupuncture
 - Biofeedback
 - Clinical Hypnosis
 - Guided Imagery
 - Meditation
 - Tai Chi and Qi Gong
 - Therapeutic Massage
 - Yoga

List 2 includes approaches that are optional to be offered by the VA, but which are generally considered safe if sites wish to make them available (it may be good to provide a link to these lists because there is some additional provisional language tied to these, such as criteria for who can provide the approach.):

- Acupressure
- Alexander Technique
- Animal-Assisted Therapy
- Aromatherapy
- Biofield Therapies
- Emotional Freedom Technique
- Healing Touch
- Reflexology
- Reiki
- Rolfing
- Somatic Experiencing
- Therapeutic Touch
- Zero Balancing

In the list below, the number after each approach's name is the number of VA facilities offering that approach, out of a total of 131 sites surveyed in 2015.[1] There is a brief description of the approach, based on the descriptions used in the VA's 2015 HAIG Complementary and Integrative Health (CIH) Survey. The list also tells you where you can learn more in the [Passport to Whole Health](#) or on the [Whole Health website](#) about a given approach. This list is by no means exhaustive. Approaches with no numbers beside them were not specifically asked about in the HAIG report but are on List 2 and are, for other reasons, important for VA clinicians to know about.

For more information about CIH, refer to the "[Implementing Whole Health in Your Practice, Part III: Complementary and Integrative Health for Veterans](#)" overview. The [National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health](#) (NCCIH) also has useful information for clinicians and patients alike at their website.

COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE APPROACHES

ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY (68)

Description: A type of therapy that involves an animal, other than a service animal, as a fundamental part of a person's treatment. Typically found within Recreational Therapy.

For More Information: "[Animal-Assisted Therapies](#)" tool on the Whole Health website

ACUPRESSURE (32)

Description: Similar to acupuncture, but pressure, instead of needles, is used on the body's surface at specific points. It is applied by hand, by elbow, or with various devices. The intent is to stimulate the flow of energy within the body.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 18, "Whole Systems of Medicine" section on Chinese Medicine

ACUPUNCTURE (79)

Description: A family of procedures involving the stimulation of anatomical (meridian) points on the body using a various technique. The acupuncture technique that has been most often studied scientifically involves penetrating the skin with needles.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 18, "Whole Systems of Medicine" section on Chinese Medicine. Refer also to the Resources section at the end of the chapter for various websites.

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Description: A method that focuses on different ways of helping people to change movement habits, with the intent of improving balance, support, coordination, and freedom of movement.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 16, “Manipulative and Body-Based Practices”

AROMATHERAPY (58)

Description: Aromatherapy uses oil extracts (essential oils) from flowers, herbs, and trees. They are inhaled to promote health and well-being.

For More Information: Refer to the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy site.

ART THERAPY (82)

Description: Art therapies involve finding healing through different forms of art, including visual arts, dance therapy, and music therapy, among others.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 12, “Power of the Mind”; “[Power of the Mind](#)” overview on the Whole Health Library website

AYURVEDA

Description: A whole medical system that originated in India. It aims to integrate the body, mind, and spirit to prevent and treat disease. Therapies used include herbs, massage, and yoga.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 18, “Whole Systems of Medicine” section on Ayurveda

BIOFEEDBACK (71)

Description: Biofeedback uses information from physiological monitoring devices to teach clients how to consciously regulate bodily functions, such as breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 12, “Power of the Mind”; “[Power of the Mind](#)” overview and “[Biofeedback](#)” tool on the Whole Health website

BIOFIELD THERAPIES

Description: “Biofield Therapies” are therapies that operate through various types of field that are known to (or hypothesized to) surround the body. Refer to “Energy Healing,” below.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 17, “Energy Medicine: Biofield Therapies”

CHELATION THERAPY

Description: Chelation therapy is a chemical process in which a substance is used to bind molecules, such as metals or minerals, and help remove them from the body.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 6, “Surroundings” has a “Detoxification” Whole Health Tool

CHIROPRACTIC (49)

Description: Chiropractic was developed by D.D. Palmer in the 1890s. Chiropractors use different techniques to manipulate the bones of the spine or other musculoskeletal structures.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 16, “Manipulative and Body-Based Practices” section on Chiropractic Care

DIETARY/NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS (43)

Description: Products that contain a vitamin, mineral, botanical, or other substance used to supplement what is taken in through the diet.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 15, “Biologically-Based Approaches: Dietary Supplements”

EMOTIONAL FREEDOM TECHNIQUE (EFT)

Description: A “counseling intervention” where acupuncture points are tapped in a specific order, with the intention of improving psychological symptoms.

For More Information: [The Gary Craig Official EFT™ Training Centers](#)

ENERGY HEALING (40)

Description: An array of therapies that are built upon the idea that the body is made of and surrounded by energy that can be maneuvered in some way to promote health. There are many types. Refer to the “Healing Touch,” Therapeutic Touch,” and “Reiki.”

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 17, “Energy Medicine: Biofield Therapies”

GUIDED IMAGERY (97)

Description: Any of various techniques, e.g. verbal suggestions, used to guide a person as they work with imagery (especially visualizations) to bring about a desired physical or emotional response.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 12, “Power of the Mind”; “[Power of the Mind](#)” overview on the Whole Health Library website

HEALING TOUCH

Description: A noninvasive energy healing technique that uses the hands to energize and balance the energy within the human body. Popular among nurses, in particular. Requires several years of formal training.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 17, “Energy Medicine: Biofield Therapies”

HERBAL MEDICINES (8)

Description: Plants or parts of plants are used for their therapeutic properties. Can be administered as crude herbs, water, alcohol solutions, or in other forms.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 15, “Biologically-Based Approaches: Dietary Supplements”; “[Implementing Whole Health in Your Practice, Part III: Complementary and Integrative Health for Veterans](#)” overview on the Whole Health website

HOMEOPATHY

Description: A whole medical system that originated in Europe. Homeopathy seeks to stimulate the body’s ability to heal itself by giving very small doses of highly diluted substances that in larger doses would produce illness or symptoms (an approach called “like cures like”).

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 18, “Whole Systems of Medicine” section on Homeopathy

CLINICAL HYPNOSIS/ HYPNOTHERAPY (38)

Description: Hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness characterized by increased responsiveness to suggestion. The hypnotic state is attained by first relaxing the body, then shifting attention toward a narrow range of objects or ideas as suggested by the hypnotist or hypnotherapist. Hypnotherapy is the medical application of hypnosis.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 12, “Power of the Mind”; “[Power of the Mind](#)” overview and “[Clinical Hypnosis](#)” tool on the Whole Health website

MASSAGE THERAPY (52) (there are many forms)

Description: Pressing, rubbing, and moving muscles and other soft tissues of the body, primarily by using the hands and fingers.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 16, “Manipulative and Body-Based Practices” section on Massage

MEDITATION (45)

Description: Meditation is a conscious mental process using certain techniques—such as focusing attention or maintaining a specific posture—to suspend the stream of thoughts and relax the body and mind. Mindfulness is a form of meditation where the focus of attention is on a physical sensation such as breathing intentionally to increase awareness of the present. Examples include *mantram* repetition (silent repetition of a sacred word or phrase, important to transcendental meditation) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR).

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 12, “Power of the Mind”; “[Power of the Mind](#)” overview; “[Mindful Awareness](#)” overview on the Whole Health website

MOVEMENT PRACTICES (28)

Description: A broad range of Eastern and Western movement-based approaches used to promote physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Examples include yoga, Pilates, and tai chi.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 5, “Moving the Body”; “[Moving the Body](#)” overview on the Whole Health website

MUSIC THERAPY (72)

Description: A form of creative arts therapy where music is used to achieve non-musical therapeutic goals.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 12, “Power of the Mind”; “[Power of the Mind](#)” overview on the Whole Health website

NATIVE AMERICAN HEALING PRACTICES (21)

Description: A Native American healer (e.g. a medicine man or woman) uses information from the spirit world to support a person’s healing or help the community. People view them for various reasons, including to find relief from illness or to receive guidance.

For More Information: *Note: It has been suggested that these areas may be more appropriately classified as being related to “[Spirit and Soul](#)” as they are sacred practices versus simply being therapeutic modalities. ([Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 11). A good resource for learning more is “[Indigenous Native American Healing Traditions](#)” and *Honoring the Medicine: The Essential Guide to Native American Healing* by Ken Cohen (2006).*

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

Description: Has its roots in Germany. Elaborated on in the U.S., especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. Proposes that there is a healing power in the body that establishes, maintains, and restores health. Practitioners work with the patient with a goal of supporting this power through treatments such as nutrition and lifestyle counseling, dietary supplements, medicinal plants, exercise, homeopathy, and treatments from traditional Chinese medicine.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 18, “Whole Systems of Medicine” section on Naturopathy

OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

Description: Osteopaths, in addition to receiving similar training to medical students, practice osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT). Several techniques are used, including muscle energy technique and craniosacral therapy.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 16, “Manipulative and Body-Based Practices” section on Osteopathy

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (85) AND PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Description: Progressive muscle relaxation is used to relieve tension and stress by having a person systematically tense and relax successive muscle groups. Progressive relaxation involves directing attention to, without moving, specific areas of the body.

For More Information: *Passport to Whole Health* Chapter 12, “Power of the Mind”; “[Power of the Mind](#)” overview, “[Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)” tool, and “[Progressive Relaxation](#)” tool on the Whole Health website

REFLEXOLOGY

Description: Reflexology holds that massaging or otherwise maneuvering one part of the body (often the feet, but may also be the hands, ears, or face) can influence and bring healing for other parts of the body. The idea is that different areas of the body contain a “map” of the rest of the body that can guide how to work with one area to affect others.

For More Information: Refer to *Therapeutic Reflexology: A Step-by-Step Guide to Professional Competence* by Paula Stone (2010)

REIKI

Description: A form of energy medicine based on the belief that there is a universal energy that supports the body's healing abilities. The healing energy is channeled from the practitioner to the patient.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 17, "Energy Medicine: Biofield Therapies"

ROLFING/ STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION

Description: Form of bodywork that views the body as a seamless network of connective tissue that can be maneuvered to realign and rebalance the body and enhance health.

For More Information: [Rolf Institute](#)

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING

Description: Body-oriented approach used to heal trauma and other stress disorders through release of "thwarted survival energy" bound in the body using movement and other techniques.

For More Information: [Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute](#)

SPECIAL DIETS (54)

Description: Major dietary changes are used to promote health. May include significant reductions or increases in certain daily nutrient intake requirements. Ideally, guided by dietitians.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 8, "Food and Drink"; "[Food and Drink](#)" overview and related tools on the Whole Health website

STRESS MANAGEMENT/ RELAXATION THERAPY (112)

Description: Relaxation therapy is a broad term used to describe a number of techniques that promote stress reduction by activating the relaxation response in the body. The goal is elimination of tension throughout the body and a calm and peaceful state of mind.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 12, "Power of the Mind"; "[Power of the Mind](#)" overview on the Whole Health website

SWEAT LODGE (18)

Description: The sweat lodge (also called purification ceremony, sweat house, medicine lodge, medicine house, or simply "sweat") is a ceremonial sauna. It is an important spiritual event in many Native American cultures.

For More Information: *Note: It has been suggested that this may be better classified as being related to “[Spirit and Soul](#),” since it is a sacred practice versus simply a therapeutic modality.*

TAI CHI/QI GONG (64)

Description: Tai chi is a practice that originated in China as a martial art. A person doing tai chi moves his or her body slowly and gently, while breathing deeply and meditating. (Tai chi is sometimes called “moving meditation.”) Qi gong is an ancient Chinese discipline combining the use of gentle physical movements, mental focus, and deep breathing directed toward specific parts of the body. Both focus on moving chi, or energy through the body by moving the body through different positions.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 5, “Moving the Body” and “Incorporating Tai Chi and Qi Gong” tool; [“Moving the Body”](#) overview on the Whole Health website

THERAPEUTIC TOUCH

Description: An adaptation of several religious and secular healing traditions. The practitioner passes his or her hands over the body of the person being treated to induce relaxation, reduce pain, and promote healing. Commonly used in nursing practice for many different conditions.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 17, “Energy Medicine: Biofield Therapies”

YOGA (96)

Description: A course of specific exercises, postures, breathing, and meditation used to promote well-being. Hatha yoga, which involves the assumption of different bodily postures, is the most familiar in Western countries.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 5, “Moving the Body”; [“Moving the Body”](#) overview and [“Yoga: Looking Beyond ‘The Mat’”](#) tool on the Whole Health website

ZERO BALANCING

Description: Zero Balancing is based on the idea that currents of energy are stored in the musculoskeletal system and can be maneuvered by body manipulation to lead to health benefit. Practitioners follow a specific protocol with gentle touch to facilitate release throughout the body.

For More Information: [Passport to Whole Health](#) Chapter 17, “Energy Medicine: Biofield Therapies”; [Zero Balancing Health Association](#).

RESOURCE LINKS

- [Animal-Assisted Therapies:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/animal-assisted-therapies.asp)
<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/animal-assisted-therapies.asp>
- [Biofeedback:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/biofeedback.asp) <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/biofeedback.asp>
- [Clinical Hypnosis:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/hypnosis.asp)
<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/hypnosis.asp>
- [Food and Drink:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/food-and-drink.asp) <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/food-and-drink.asp>
- [Implementing Whole Health in Your Practice, Part III: Complementary and Integrative Health for Veterans:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/overviews/part-iii-complementary-integrative-health.asp)
<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/overviews/part-iii-complementary-integrative-health.asp>
- [Mindful Awareness:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/mindful-awareness.asp) <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/mindful-awareness.asp>
- [Moving the Body:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/moving-your-body.asp) <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/moving-your-body.asp>
- [Passport to Whole Health:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/docs/Passport_to_WholeHealth_FY2020_508.pdf)
https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/docs/Passport_to_WholeHealth_FY2020_508.pdf
- [Power of the Mind:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/power-of-the-mind.asp) <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/power-of-the-mind.asp>
- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/progressive-muscle-relaxation.asp)
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- [Spirit and Soul:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/spirit-soul.asp) <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/self-care/spirit-soul.asp>
- [Yoga: Looking Beyond the Map:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/yoga.asp)
<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/yoga.asp>

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1. Healthcare Analysis and Information Group (HAIG). FY 2015 VHA Complementary and Integrative Health (CIH) Services (formerly CAM).
https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FY2015_VHA_CIH_signedReport.pdf. Accessed September 27, 2018.